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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000471

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: RANGOON MISSIONS ON PREPARATIONS FOR BANGKOK II

REF: A. RANGOON 456 AND PREVIOUS

[B](#). BANGKOK 2413 AND PREVIOUS

[C](#). KUALA LUMPUR 1403 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Our recent calls on six Rangoon-based EU and ASEAN diplomatic missions to discuss the second meeting of the "Bangkok Process" on Burma revealed a range of assessments on the road that lies ahead. Most of the missions believe that the SPDC will release ASSK within days or weeks and they almost uniformly view the Bangkok Process as a helpful mechanism to achieving forward movement. To the contrary, we see every sign that the SPDC has agreed to participate in Bangkok as a means to pacify the international community. The generals intend, as always, to go where they want, how they want, and when they want. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) April 7-8 COM and P/E Chief called on a half dozen available EU and ASEAN Ambassadors (and one Charge) to discuss recent political developments and to gain insight into the upcoming Bangkok meeting on Burma on April 30. Key highlights follow in paras 3-7.

[1](#)3. (C) The British:

-- Ambassador Vicky Bowman said that the RTG had not issued an invitation to the UK to attend the Bangkok meeting nor had the UK requested one. "However," she added, "we would go if invited," noting that Foreign Secretary O'Brien was keen to use any opportunity to press the GOB on the need to make forward movement. In the interim, the UK is helping to push for the EU to get a seat at the table.

-- Bowman expressed her strong "gut feeling" that the SPDC will allow ASSK to meet with the entire NLD CEC o/a April 15 and then release her from house arrest a day or two later. She cited a number of factors that lead her to this conclusion: UN Special Envoy Razali's assessment that ASSK will be released o/a April 17; pressure from the Thai and other ASEAN countries; the upcoming ASEM meeting on April 17-18, the success of which hinges in part on progress in Burma (on the latter point, Bowman said that the Japanese have been telling the ASEAN countries that the EU "will crumble" and let Burma participate in ASEM).

-- Bowman said her Home Office has prepared a draft statement should ASSK be released within the next week or so. In that statement, the UK would welcome ASSK's freedom and note that their Ambassador in Rangoon "intends to see her as soon as possible." We noted our doubts about ASSK's imminent release, but agreed that contingency language was sensible, given that Rangoon will shut down for water festival April 12-16. However, we advised that it might be more helpful to note that the British Ambassador "hopes" to see ASSK, given that ASSK's intentions are unknown. We also noted that if Washington issued a statement upon her release, the USG would also likely call for the reopening of NLD offices.

[1](#)4. (C) The Germans:

-- Charge d'affaires Christoph Retzlaff said that an MFA Asia Director (A/S equivalent) would represent Germany at the Bangkok II meeting. He said that new participants for the next round include Norway, Switzerland, Bangladesh, Laos, and Malaysia. He added that the EU wants an invitation, but the Thai are being "cautious."

-- Retzlaff said that Germany had no illusions about the value of the Bangkok Process, observing that it was not a decision-making mechanism and Burmese FM Win Aung had no mandate from the SPDC to negotiate. However, he said, it is a positive development that the GOB actually agrees to discuss internal matters and, in turn, may be "influenced when exposed to the international community."

-- Retzlaff observed that it is very clear that the entire road map process depends on the participation of the NLD. The SPDC may now be in a "comfortable" position, having announced the reconvening of the National Convention, but the regime will lose all credibility if the process is not open and inclusive.

-- According to Retzlaff, the German Embassy recently took the lead on an EU joint demarche on the GOB which provided suggestions for a successful National Convention and urged the adoption of democratic procedures in drafting a new constitution. "The problem," he said, "is that these guys don't react to the outside world."

#### 15. (C) The French:

-- Ambassador Jean-Michel Lacombe said that the Quai's Asia Director (A/S equivalent) will represent France at Bangkok II, but will first travel to Rangoon to "see as many people as he can." France, said Lacombe, wants to give the Bangkok Process a chance to work.

-- Lacombe said he believed ASSK would soon be released and opined that the GOB would not have announced the reconvening of the National Convention "without some understanding with her." We observed that the regime had likely made the surprise announcement to reconvene at an earlier date than expected simply to be in a position to bring a "deliverable" to the Bangkok meeting.

-- Lacombe added that he felt enhancing EU sanctions would be counterproductive and described such action as "more for domestic consumption in Europe" than for having an impact in Burma where the GOB has ample economic support from neighboring countries.

#### 16. (C) The Italians

-- Italy plans to "downgrade" their participation at Bangkok II from Deputy Foreign Minister to the Asia Director level. Ambassador Raffaele Miniero said that Italy would advocate a carrot and stick approach to the SPDC. "We must be careful and not say the road map is rubbish," Miniero said. "We didn't react when the regime released ASSK in 2002 and they failed to continue forward progress."

-- In this regard, Miniero said, Italy was prepared to discuss at Bangkok II possible assistance to Burma if the regime takes appropriate steps. COM replied that simply reconvening the National Convention should not be the only measure of progress; the regime must release ASSK and other NLD leaders and allow full participation and transparency in the drafting of a new constitution.

-- Miniero said he recently met with Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister U Kyaw Thu and told the DFM that the GOB needed to have ASSK and the NLD on board in order to have a successful road map process. The DFM responded, "Don't expect too much." Miniero concluded that the GOB is not worried about the National Convention process, but has greater concerns about national elections and how some among the international community will respond. He added that the GOB only wants to do something that is acceptable to ASEAN, especially in time to host the ASEAN Summit in 2006, and doesn't care about the West.

#### 17. (C) The Lao and the Cambodians:

-- Lao Ambassador Chanthavy Bodhisane said that Laos would join Bangkok II "to gain understanding about how the process is unfolding." He said he had no confirmation from Vientiane that the GOL had accepted an invitation from the RTG, but said that Laos would participate as recognition of "growing Lao-Thai cooperation."

-- We inquired if Laos intended to approach the Burmese pro-democracy opposition to gain their perspective before Bangkok II. Bodhisane replied, "No way."

-- Cambodian Ambassador Hul Phany said he had read in Bangkok papers that Cambodia would be invited to Bangkok II. "We would go if invited," he said, "but we have received no invitation."

-- Phany said that a National Convention without ASSK and the NLD "would not be interesting." He said that all political parties must be allowed to participate and he expressed hope that negotiations would lead to a new constitution.

18. (C) Comment: If the Rangoon missions are any indication, EU governments will use Bangkok II as an opportunity to gently prod the GOB in the right direction, while the ASEAN governments are prepared to accept the minimal steps taken thus far as sufficient evidence the GOB is already on the right track. Both approaches are premised in part on the assumption that SPDC leaders accept that the Bangkok Process will provide sign posts that they need to follow on their road map to democracy. To the contrary, we see every sign that the SPDC has agreed to participate in Bangkok as a means to pacify the international community. They intend, as always, to go where they want, how they want, and when they want. End Comment.

